

The Role of Historical Cultural Memory in Uzbek Documentary Cinema

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Abstract: The article discusses some issues in the development of documentary filmmaking in Uzbekistan. The importance of historical subject as an important component of the historical memory category is highlighted.

Keywords: documentary cinema, historical memory, cultural memory, docudrama, television format, imagery.

Introduction

During the last decade all the areas of humanities philosophy, culturology, sociology, art criticism are getting more and more interested in the historical memory and cultural memory. Jan and Aleida Assman were the pioneers in developing this trend and introducing the term "cultural memory" [1, p. 136; 2].

Reading about these writings suggested a different perspective on contemporary cinematography in Uzbekistan, which demonstrates a gravitation towards historical themes. This article will not cover the entire range of national cinematography, but only its documentary part.

Uzbekistan's documentary cinema has always been an integral part of cinematography, cinema art, and the entire artistic culture, an accumulator and exponent of ideas and public consciousness. Its history, which has been extensively studied at different periods of development through film studies, film journalism, and other modern media, has been studied in varying degrees. However, there are still no fundamental studies on the modern period, which covers more than 30 years. Today, these issues are more relevant than ever and urgently require reflection. Themes of films that in one way or another touch on issues of historical and cultural memory also require some reflection.

Main body

So far film studies in Uzbekistan have not dealt with this thematic issue, although analyses of the development process of national cinematography have been conducted in its various forms and directions. In recent years, an increasing number of young people have become involved in the study of science, and are studying both past and present cinematography, as well as forecasting its future. Although this research is still in its early stages, we can already see attempts to outline this theme in our analyses of the film process.

But to delve into this subject, one needs to have an understanding of the course of their country's history, its culture, mentality, and rich traditions. *"Divergent perceptions of culture are usually considered to be indirect manifestations of the mentality that characterises the different peoples of the world. Mentality, in turn, relies on memory mechanisms. Since this issue belongs to one of the most discussed and least studied, in this area we have to limit ourselves to working hypotheses, which are often confirmed or refuted by life itself"* [3, p. 11].

In contemporary documentary filmmaking, as in other periods of its history, there has always been a desire to use its own cinematic language, regardless of the various ideological attitudes of socio-political formations. An example of this is the extensive creative experience of **Malik**

Kayumov, an outstanding documentary filmmaker, whose films, for the most part, constitute a film chronicle of the time in which this unsurpassed master lived and worked, and have become a source of historical memory of the bygone century. His exceptional documentary masterpiece is known as *"The Paranja"*, a master class for future generations of documentary filmmakers. Sharpness of the theme, the author's position, harsh editing palette, and how much depth of thought... This film is a warning! Today, in our challenging times, this film has acquired a new meaning... *"Malik Kayumov's films were mostly distinguished by deep thought, high patriotism, and extraordinary love for their native land and people; they were personal films, in which the author's position was always present"* [4, p. 7].

In the late 1990s of the 20th century and even in the beginning of the 21st century Uzbek documentary film was in search of new themes, genres and ways of presenting the material, comprehending new historical realities and new challenges in their screen implementation. At the same time, these years are the years of restoring historical truth, national consciousness and national identity in the new conditions of gaining sovereign freedom. Contemporary documentary filmmaking can use this heritage for its further progressive movement, and young documentary filmmakers can benefit from studying the richest work of this master like Malik Kayumov.

The picture of the transformation of a historical, regular reality has been portrayed in the films of the middle generation of documentary filmmakers. Their creative potential has yielded results in a fertile environment of relatively free expression.

Contemporary documentary filmmaking in Uzbekistan, in principle, staying true to the course of its development determined by the new historical realities, constructs the present, the past and, perhaps, the future of an independent country in its best works.

In recent years, Uzbek cinema has paid close attention to historical themes and the issue of perpetuating the memory of historical figures. Over the past few years, a number of films have been made that merit the attention of film researchers. The films include *"Imom Abu Iso Muhammad Termiziy"*, *"Avloniy"*, *"Ibrat"*, *"Ilkhak"*, *"Qo'qon Shamoli"*, and *"Said Bilan Said"*. They recreate the images of national historical figures and the cross-section of events related to socio-political situations that the country and the people have experienced in different historical periods. The films are ambiguous in their artistic parameters, but their authors present the viewer with artistic interpretations of various historical events and the characters involved in them.

Uzbekistan's documentary film industry has also repeatedly turned to historical subjects at different periods and stages in its development. All these historical figures and no less important others have been recreated by Uzbek documentary filmmakers. Movies such as *"Navoi gulshani"*, *"Nodirabegim"*, *"Ulugbek"*, *"Makhmudkhoja Behbudiy"*, *"Munavvarkori Abdurashidov"*, *"Buyuk Sohibkiron"*, *"Temur tuzuklari"*, *"Bobur Salomi"*, *"Fitrat"*, *"Chulpon"*, *"Asad Ismatov"*, *"Imom al-Bukhoriy"* (2 films, 1997, 2007), *"Behzod"*, *"Avesta"*, *"Shohizinda"*, *"Khudoybergan Devonov"*, *"Horazm Ma'mun akademyasi"*, *"Ishokhon Ibrat"*, *"Muskhafi Usmoniy"*. As we can see, the 1990s and 2000s abounded in films with historical themes. These films, in terms of genre, may not be equally expressive or historically accurate, but most of them use rich historical material from film and photo documents. These documents are carefully preserved in the state archives, representing the material embodiment of historical and cultural memory.

Modern international film studies use in their research the terms of new genres of documentary film, such as docudrama, mockumentary or classic historical and biographical documentary of television format (formative documentary). These genres are also actively penetrating into Uzbek cinema.

Such movies as *"From the History of Uzbek Photography"* (2011), *"The History of Silent Cinema in Uzbekistan"* (2018, directed by E. Abbosov), *"The Happiness and Tragedy of Nabi"*

Ganizoda" (2017, directed by S. Nazarmukhamedov), and *"I Have Not Forgotten You"* (2018, directed by A. Khamraev) have been created in these genres.

In recent years, Uzbek documentary films have also deepened the theme of the Second World War. Here it is appropriate to mention two films that are subject to in-depth analysis. These *are* *"Xalq Jasorati"* by A. Khamrayev and *"Matonat"* by Sh. Makhmudov.

Modern documentary cinematography in Uzbekistan over the past 20-30 years has accumulated enough material in the form of films of different genres, different subjects, and screen expressiveness. If we talk about some definite trends, the best films show that these films have a definite ideological orientation. Under the conditions of an independent state, filmmakers face new challenges. Apart from documenting events and creating new characters, the challenge is to model an attractive socially-significant ideal in screen culture and embody it in documentary cinema. In terms of genre, as has been the case for many years now, there is a pedagogy on portrait films. This is a kind of ontology of science, art and literature. In terms of subject matter, the historical theme is as much in honour of documentary filmmakers as of fiction filmmakers.

Documentary studies in Uzbekistan have carried out a project that addresses the topic of historical memory, the main function of which is to preserve information about famous historical figures: outstanding Uzbek writers and poets who made an invaluable contribution to the development of national literature and the artistic culture of the Uzbek people in general. This is a very significant and landmark project, the need for which has been outlined in a number of recent government documents [5, 6].

Sculptural monuments have been erected in the capital city of Uzbekistan, a scenic alleyway immortalizing the images of outstanding representatives of Uzbek literature. Their life and work spans periods spanning centuries, decades... . These sculptures are part and parcel of the fine arts, but they are an archival component of the historical and cultural memory of the Uzbek people and humanity as a whole. *"The past decades of the past century and the first decade of the present one have been marked by a surge of interest in the theme of memory that has taken a very special place among other topics of contemporary socio-philosophical and humanitarian discourse"* [7, p. 12].

In this regard, the restoration of *"Adiblar Xiyoboni"* (Writers Alley) alley in the National Park named after Alisher Navoi in Uzbekistan demonstrates in practice the relevance of the theme of historical memory in art in general and in cinema art in particular (in its documentary form), the significance and acuteness of the cultural memory theme in the era of digital media.

The movies in the *"Adiblar Xiyoboni"* special series are a tribute to the historical figures whose contribution to the nation's culture, self-awareness and identity is difficult to overestimate, and most importantly, they are pages of a kind of annals of cultural memory important for preserving one's own identity in the era of globalization processes.

More than 20 films in this series are practically of the same genre - documentary biopics with elements of documentary drama (docudrama). The narrative of the majority of films is supplemented, illustrated by reconstructed events of a bygone time, epoch, life of a selected hero of the film, his activity and personal characteristics. Often the hero of the selected films is an outstanding personality, his complex contradictory path, doubts, aspirations, and, at times, tragic fate arouses genuine interest in most viewers.

It is worth noting that the theme of historical memory has also been widely used in Uzbek feature films over the last ten to fifteen years. Among them are *"Imom Abu Iso Muhammad Termiziy"* (dir. A. Mignorov), *"Avloniy"* (dir. M. Erkinov), *"Ibrat"* (dir. D. Kasymov), *"Ilkhak"* (D. Akhmedov), *"Qo'qon Shamoli"* (dir. D. Masaidov), *"Said Bilan Said"* (dir. N. Abbasov). These films present the images of the national historical figures and the cross-section of the events related to socio-political situations that the country and the people have experienced in different historical periods. The films are not without artistic expression, but their authors present the viewer with an artistic interpretation of various historical events and the

characters involved in them.

The documentary film series *"Adiblar Xiyoboni"* is valuable, above all, for its educational potential and deep ideological meaning. At the same time, the theme of memory, both historical and cultural, which is particularly acute and topical today, occupies a prominent place in various fields of knowledge.

The on-screen images in the *"Adiblar Xiyoboni"* films have an enormous impact on people's perceptions of historical events. The heroes of the documentaries include Alisher Navoi in *"Alisher Navoi"* (screenplay by F. Usmanov, dir. Sh. Rasulov), Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur in *"Tulbars izidan"* (scene and director B. Yuldashev), Furkhat in *"Furkhat bor ekan takirda"* (scene by B. Yakubov, director M. Karabaev), Mukimiy in *"Muqimiy"*. *"So'zki hak bo'lsa"* (scene by B. Okbutayev, dir. I. Muhammadibraimov), Abdullah Kadiri in the film of the same name (scene by I. Kushayeva, dir. U. Khamdamov), Chulpan in *"Chulpon"*. *"Qush esdaligi"* (scene by E. Bozorov, dir. H. Rashidov), Oybek in a film of the same name (scene and dir. E. Abbasov), Abdullah Kahhar in *"Xaqiqat - mendan ustun"* (scene by Sh. Butayev, dir. M. Karabaev), Abdullah Aripov in a film of the same name (scene by F. Usmonov, dir. F. Usmonov, dir. Sh. Rasulov), and a number of other renowned poets and writers, whose life and work provided a screenplay base for biographical portrait films; these are genuine historical figures.

Conclusion

A distinctive feature of these films is the involvement of young cinematographers in the project. Their fresh and creative outlook, bold, and at times daring use of expressive means in the contemporary world documentary cinema, and their authorial stance have enabled the contemporary documentary filmmaking of Uzbekistan to move to another, non-traditional level.

Although these films are ambiguous in their expressiveness, some of them, such as *"Alisher Navoi"*, *"Xaqiqat - mendan ustun"*, *"Chulpon"*, *"Qush Esdaligi"*, *"Avloniy"*, *"Oybek"*, and *"Abdullah Aripov"* - all sounded fresh and exciting in a new way, urging the viewer to think, reflect, and understand the past not on the biological, physical level, but on the spiritual. These films have most accurately captured the spirit of the time, with expressive means in a unified style; the visuals take precedence over the verbal; the dynamics of the drama is supported by well-chosen musical compositions. The actors' work in the reconstructions complements the documentary narrative. Poetic lines from the work of the protagonists in the films, either on camera or offscreen, enhance the artistic sound of the documentary. And, most importantly, these films capture screen images of the colour of the Uzbek nation whose life and work are pages in the country's history and whose memory will live on for many years to come.

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